

## Q: What is an algae bloom?

Algae are microscopic organisms that grow naturally in oceans and fresh waters. Under certain conditions, some algae can grow into a large visible mass called an algal bloom.

## Q: Why are algae blooms a health concern?

Not all blooms are harmful, but some species of algae, such as cyanobacteria or blue-green algae, can produce toxins or poisons that can cause serious illness or death in pets, livestock, wildlife and humans. When this occurs, the bloom is called a harmful algae bloom (HAB).

## Q: How will I know if a harmful algae bloom is present?

Unfortunately, you cannot tell if an algae bloom is toxic just by looking at it. Higher levels of toxins are typically associated with algae blooms that appear as thick foam or scum on the water's surface. They can be bright green, blue-green, white or brown in color. If you come across areas of thick algae, take precaution by avoiding water contact and keeping pets out of the water.



## Q: What are the health risks posed by exposure to a HAB?

There have been no documented cases of human illness associated with a HAB in Missouri. However, there have been cases of livestock and pet illness and/or death linked to HABs.

Skin irritation or rash is the most commonly reported health effect. Other symptoms range from diarrhea, cramps and vomiting to fainting, numbness, dizziness, tingling and temporary paralysis. The most severe reactions occur when large amounts of water are swallowed.

## Q: Is it safe to eat the fish?

Fish caught in affected waters pose unknown health risks and may have an undesirable taste. If you choose to eat them, remove all fat, skin and organs before cooking, because toxins are more likely to collect in these tissues. Always cook fish thoroughly.

## Q: How can I protect myself when I am camping or recreating at a lake where a bloom is present?

Stay out of the affected water. Keep children and pets away. Never use the affected water for drinking, cooking, or bathing. If moist or dried scum is noticeable along the shoreline, do not allow children or pets to play in that section of shoreline. If you come in contact with the affected water, wash off thoroughly with soap and a clean source of water.



## Q: Can I treat algae-affected water to make it safe to drink?

No. Personal water filtration devices that may be purchased in outdoor recreational stores have not been proven to be effective at removing these toxins. Boiling water will not remove the toxins.

## Blue Green Algae & Me

**Q:** Is it OK for my pets and livestock to enter and/or drink the water?

There have been cases in Missouri of livestock and pet illness and/or death linked to HABs. If algae scum is floating on the water, block access to the affected water and provide another water source for them to drink.



**Q:** How can I treat my private pond to ensure I do not get blue-green algae?

Once a bloom occurs, attempting to remove the algae or toxins may make the situation worse. It may be best to let the bloom run its course and take steps to reduce the chance of another bloom occurring in the future. This may include preventing or reducing nutrients (fertilizer, runoff from livestock, etc.) from entering the water body. More information can be found in the Missouri Department of Conservation's *Aquaguide: Algae Control in Lakes and Ponds* <http://mdc.mo.gov/landwater-care/lake-and-pond-management/aquaguides>.

**Q:** Where can I get more information?

Lakes of Missouri Volunteer Program  
[www.lmvp.org/bluegreen](http://www.lmvp.org/bluegreen)

US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) *Facts about Cyanobacteria & Cyanobacterial Harmful Algal Blooms* <http://www.cdc.gov/hab/cyanobacteria/pdfs/facts.pdf>

Missouri Department of Conservation's *Aquaguide: Algae Control in Lakes and Ponds* <http://mdc.mo.gov/landwater-care/lake-and-pond-management/aquaguides>.

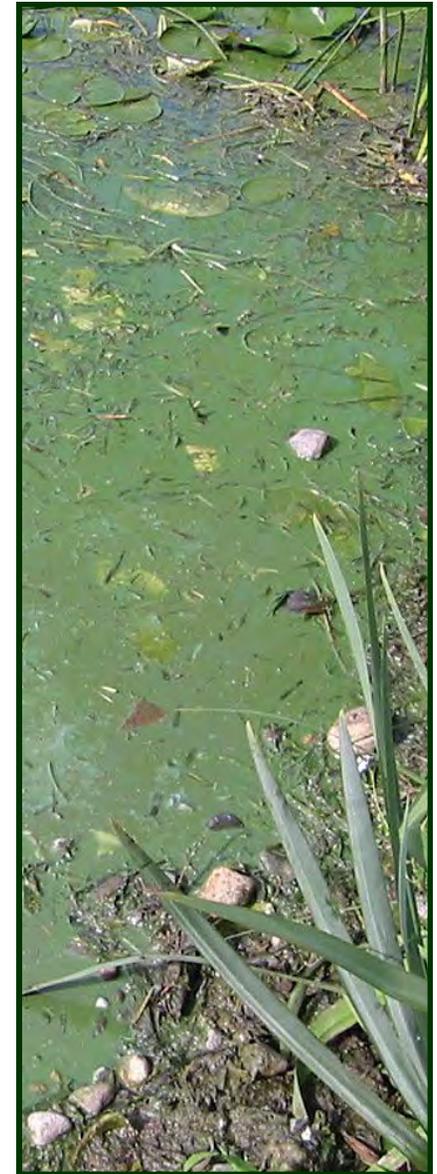
Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, Recreational Waters <http://health.mo.gov/safety/recreationalwater/index.php>



This document is modeled from the Oregon Department of Human Services brochure. Used with permission and modified for Missouri.

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July 2015



## Stay Out, No Doubt!